



**2011 CONVENTION**

**"STRENGTH  
IN UNITY"**



Senator Mark Begich visits with Kwigillingok elder Owen Beaver during a summer 2011 tour of the village.

★ *News from*



## UNITED STATES SENATOR MARK BEGICH

MARK BEGICH  
ALASKA

  
UNITED STATES SENATE  
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20510

Dear Fellow Alaskan:

Welcome to the 2011 Alaska Federation of Natives Convention.

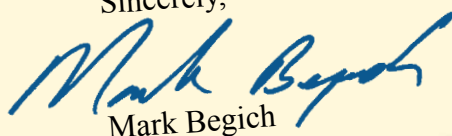
Each year I am humbled to be invited to join you for this important gathering. This will be my ninth year participating in the AFN Convention, the first few years as Mayor of Anchorage and now as your U.S. Senator. It is no surprise that every time I have walked away with a greater appreciation of the visionary leadership your collaborative work brings to our state.

May you experience great success and accomplishment as you gather over the next few days to set priorities for the coming year, celebrate your rich heritage, and visit with new and old friends. I certainly look forward to hearing about the outcomes and memories from this convention.

Consider this newsletter an update on the numerous issues impacting rural and Alaska Native communities that we have worked on together this past year. Please continue to share your concerns, insights and wisdom as I work diligently to represent you in the U.S. Senate.

*Quyana. Háw'aa. Doykshin. Quyanaq.  
Gunalchéesh. Ana Baasee'. Qagaaskung. Thank you.*

Sincerely,

  
Mark Begich  
United States Senator

### **News to Use**

#### **How to contact Senator Begich**

Senator Begich wants to hear from you – join him on Facebook, Twitter, monthly telephone town halls or sign up for his bi-weekly electronic newsletter. Also, tune to the Alaska Report hosted by Senator Begich every other month, which airs on more than a dozen TV channels across Alaska. See the back page for contact information for the Senator's offices; call his Anchorage office toll free at (877) 501-6275 or visit his website <http://begich.senate.gov>.

#### **Helping Alaskans cut through government red tape**

Senator Begich can help Alaskans cut through red tape with federal departments and agencies. His staff is pleased to answer your questions about federal programs, assist you with grants, and work with you to resolve problems. Call Senator Begich's office toll free: (877) 501-6275.

#### **Internships with Senator Begich**

Senator Begich's office accepts applications for college internships throughout the year. Positions are available in Washington, Anchorage, Fairbanks and Juneau. Instructions on how to apply and eligibility requirements are available on his website at <http://begich.senate.gov>.

#### **Constituent Coffees with Senator Begich**

Nearly every week in the spring in Washington, D.C., Senator Begich hosts constituent coffees for Alaskans, usually Thursdays from 8:30-9:30 a.m. This is a great opportunity to talk to Senator Begich, his staff and get a photo with the Senator.



# EMPOWERING RURAL COMMUNITIES

## Beginch Works to Protect Rural Subsistence

Subsistence hunting and fishing has been a cornerstone of Alaska Native cultures for 10,000 years. Today this traditional practice also ensures Alaskans in rural areas are able to offset an extremely high cost of living.



Recognizing the complex nature of a subsistence management in Alaska, in February I renewed my request to the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs to hold an oversight hearing on subsistence management. I believe this hearing would provide an avenue for stakeholders to explore new, innovative ways of ensuring sustainability of this historic practice.

I am also proud to share the news that the Department of the Interior is working to fill two subsistence user seats on the Federal Subsistence Board. These new appointments will likely be made this fall, allowing the new board members to be seated in time for the first meeting of 2012. ■

## Senator Supports Suicide Prevention Efforts

Addressing the high rate of suicide in our rural communities is a fragile but critical issue we must continue to address. Although federal resources like the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration have offered great support to Alaskans, much more must be done. I raised this issue with Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius while she was in Alaska this summer.

I will continue to support pilot programs, like the Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation's (YKHC) Qungasvik project. This three-year project, a partnership between YKHC and the University of Alaska, is an evidence-based study identifying best practices for suicide prevention. ■

## Giving More Tools for Public Safety

When tribes and Alaska Native leaders approached me early in my term about the need for greater public safety resources, I worked closely with them to draft the Alaska Safe Families and Villages Act. Designed to better address high rates of suicide, drug and alcohol abuse and sexual assault, I reintroduced this bill in June 2011.

If passed, this legislation would provide funding for eligible Alaska Native tribes to participate in a demonstration project that allows the tribes to establish tribal ordinances, create or strengthen tribal courts and impose sanctions like community service on violators. ■

## Education Reform Vital for Rural Alaska

Even during these difficult fiscal times, we must continue to invest in our children's future. The current No Child Left Behind law is a poor fit for Alaska and should be thrown out.

I continue to work on comprehensive education reform that restores local and parental control, emphasizes early childhood education and recognizes Alaska's unique geography, weather, cultures, languages and workforce. All schools, regardless of size and location, should benefit from funding made available from the federal government.

With this in mind, I have introduced legislation that sets aside 25 percent of Innovation Act funds for rural areas to help them fairly compete for the resources needed to implement innovative education initiatives. I also have introduced legislation creating an Office of Rural Education Policy to better coordinate rural education efforts and ensure the impact on rural schools is considered by all new federal education policies. ■



*Senator Beginch encourages students in the Southwest village of New Stuyahok to work hard and stay in school.*



# FIGHTING FOR VETERANS, DEVELOPMENT

## Alaska Hosts VA Secretary

For too long our rural veterans have had to overcome access challenges, at great cost, to use the benefits they have already earned.

In early June, I introduced the Alaska Hero's Card Act. This bill establishes a pilot program that allows veterans in roadless rural areas to receive health care benefits from the Veterans Administration at facilities available in their own communities. Congressman Don Young introduced the House companion bill to this important legislation.

It was an honor to bring Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric Shinseki to Alaska over the Memorial Day holiday. In an effort

to show him the unique challenges rural veterans face, I took him to Bethel and the coastal village of Kwigillingok to experience rural Alaska first-hand.

Secretary Shinseki joined me in honoring surviving members of Alaska's Territorial Guard and participated in a veterans listening session in Bethel. We even got him on a four-wheeler. I believe the Secretary left Alaska with a much deeper appreciation for what "rural" truly means and will continue to utilize that experience as he advocates for our nation's veterans.

Finally, I was proud to welcome Stephanie Birdwell, director of the first-ever Office of Tribal Government Relations at the Veterans Administration (VA), and Susan Yeager, rural veterans liaison at the Alaska VA. ■



From left: YKHC Vice President of Administration Dan Winkelman, Bethel veteran Fritz Charles, and Senator Mark Begich explain to Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric Shinseki how to eat salmon strips given to him by the veterans of VFW Post 10041. (Photo Courtesy YKHC)

## Begich Delivers for Rural Facility Needs

Much of rural Alaska remains in need of basic, quality infrastructure, such as roads, housing, and water and sewer systems. This deficit of infrastructure, coupled with the need for local, high wage jobs, is why I supported the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). Because of this legislation, \$1.6 billion - the highest amount of funding per capita of any state - was funneled directly to construction-ready Alaska projects.

One of the largest projects, \$152 million for the new Norton Sound Regional Hospital, is on schedule to be completed in the fall of 2012. In addition to the construction jobs created by the project, the new facility will bring nearly 170 permanent jobs to the region. Other major projects funded through ARRA included nearly \$38 million to stabilize Kotzebue's Shore Avenue; \$28 million for the Akutan harbor; and nearly \$15 million for the Ouzinkie airport.

Despite our nation's challenging economic times, I remain committed to ensuring the budget is not balanced at the expense of vital programs like the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant program. I was proud to support the investment of over \$12 million in energy efficiency projects for Alaska tribes through the Recovery Act.

Allowing rural homes to be cold during our state's harsh

winters is not an option. That is why I have been working to make sure rural residents have access to high quality, affordable housing through several sustainability initiatives. I believe partnering with organizations—like the Cold Climate Housing Research Center—will ensure housing built through federally funded programs, such as the Native American Housing and Self Determination Act (NAHASDA) and USDA's Self Help Housing program, utilize the nation's leading energy efficient and cost effective technologies. ■

## Senator Defends 8(a) Jobs for Rural Alaskans

Once again the participation of Alaska Native Corporations (ANC) in the Small Business Administration's (SBA) 8(a) Business Development program is under attack.

I successfully fought efforts by Senators John McCain and Claire McCaskill as they tried to cap ANC participation in the program, and I will continue to fight any misguided efforts to harm the groups participating in the program.

Earlier this year, the SBA released long overdue regulations aimed at closing many loopholes and clarifying rules for participants. It is imperative critics of this program allow these regulations go into effect to see if there should be any legislative changes. I will continue to fight any so-called reform efforts from those senators who do not understand the program or its benefits. ■



# BUILDING STRONG RURAL ECONOMIES

## Internet Access Vital for Development

I was pleased to join GCI/UII in August to celebrate the arrival of middle mile high speed broadband in the Bristol Bay and Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta regions. The project was supported with more than \$88 million in Recovery Act dollars and will connect more than 100 villages.

I brought the Federal Communications Commission Chairman Julius Genachowski and U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Utilities Service Administrator Jonathan Adelstein to Dillingham and New Stuyahok to see first-hand how high-speed Internet can give rural Alaskans the opportunity for economic development and jobs, better education, and improved access to health care.

I have also been working with my colleagues in the Senate to ensure we maintain the Universal Service Fund—which pays for much of the cost of Internet for our rural schools, libraries, clinics and telephone providers. ■



Senator Mark Begich helps cut the ribbon for the TERRA Southwest project, a broadband infrastructure project supported by more than \$88 million in federal Recovery Act dollars.

## Begich Saves Rural Post Offices

In July, I was deeply concerned to hear the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) was considering closure of 36 Alaska post offices, 31 of which are located in rural villages with only one post office available to residents.

I called the Postmaster General, Patrick Donahoe, to advocate for Alaska post offices, explaining that the USPS is essential to our way of life. As rural Alaskans know best, the USPS is used to mail medication, groceries, and other supplies such as building materials and equipment.

As a member of the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee, which has oversight of the USPS, I was proud to announce in early September that 31 village post offices being reviewed by the USPS will remain open for business. I will continue to use my role on the Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee to protect rural Alaska’s interests. ■

## Affordable Air Service Essential

I was proud to successfully protect rural air service in Alaska this year, fighting back efforts by Senator McCain to eliminate the Essential Air Service Program.

Without this program, rural Alaska communities would have been largely cut off from the rest of the state and experienced a dramatic increase in the cost of living. I used letters I received from Alaskans to make my case on the Senate floor and together we saved more than \$12 million in Essential Air Service funding for 44 Alaska communities. ■

## 2011 ANNUAL AFN CONVENTION SCHEDULE :: OCTOBER 20-22, 2011

A full convention schedule is available at <http://www.nativefederation.org>

**THURSDAY, Oct 20**

8:30 am – 5:00 pm  
*Annual Convention*

10:00 am  
*Remarks by Congressman Don Young*

10:20 am  
*Keynote Address: John Quniaq Baker*

2:35 pm  
*Convention Dialogue: Unity*

**FRIDAY, Oct 21**

8:30 am – 5:00 pm  
*Annual Convention*

9:05 am  
*Remarks by Governor Sean Parnell*

9:35 am  
*Convention Dialogue: Strengthening Our Relationship with the State of Alaska*

4:00 pm  
*Remarks by Senator Lisa Murkowski*

**SATURDAY, Oct 22**

8:30 am – 4:00 pm  
*Annual Convention*

9:15 am  
*Convention Dialogue Resume*

11:40 am  
*Remarks by Senator Mark Begich*

3:45 am  
*Closing Remarks*

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